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AUTHOR Jorde-Bloom, Paula
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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest provides an overview of the competencies needed for effective early childhood center administration and summarizes state regulations governing minimum qualifications of center directors. Specific administrator skills are listed in four topical areas: (1) organization, leadership, and management; (2) child development and early childhood programming; (3) fiscal and legal considerations; and (4) board, parent, and community relations. State regulations governing minimum qualifications are discussed in terms of background qualifications and qualifications related to experience and formal education. Brief remarks on current levels of training and experience of child care directors complete the digest. (RH)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 333-1386

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ERIC Digest

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Child Care Directors' Training and Qualifications

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Paula Jorde-Bloom

The director's role in the early childhood center is central and complex. While there is agreement about the need for highly trained personnel to serve as directors, there is a surprising lack of agreement about directors' training and minimum qualifications. This digest provides an overview of the competencies needed for effective center administration and summarizes state regulations governing minimum qualifications.

The Multifaceted Role of the Child Care Director

The skills and competencies needed to effectively administer a child care center vary according to the age and background of the children enrolled, the services provided, the philosophical orientation of the program, the local sponsorship of the center, and program size. Directors of very small programs may have few administrative tasks and may serve as a classroom teacher part of the day, while directors of large programs may have to coordinate multiple sites and funding sources and a large staff. Researchers and teachers agree that four major task performance areas are encompassed in the director's role:

Organization, Leadership and Management. Directors are expected to:

- assess program needs,
- articulate a clear vision,
- implement goals,
- evaluate program effectiveness,
- recruit, train, and supervise staff,
- translate program goals into well-written policies and procedures,
- know about leadership styles and group behavior,
- understand their professional identity and responsibility,
- be alert to changing demographics, social and economic trends, and developments in the field.

Child Development and Early Childhood Programming. Directors need to assess each child's needs and assist staff in planning developmentally appropriate experiences. Their organizational skills can be used to implement effective systems to keep track of enrollment, attendance, and anecdotal data.

Directors need to understand:

- developmental patterns in early childhood and their implications for child care,
- environmental psychology and the arrangements of space and materials that support development,
- health, safety, and nutrition in care programs.

Fiscal and Legal Considerations. Directors are expected to know federal, state, and local regulations governing child care centers, and be able to develop a budget, set tuition rates, prepare financial reports, maintain insurance coverage, and use fundraising and grantsmanship to secure funding from various sources.

Board, Parent, and Community Relations. Directors need to be able to:

- articulate a rationale for program practices to the advisory board, owner, or sponsor,
- interpret child development for parents and others in the community,
- regularly contact professional organizations, congressional representatives, public schools, the media, community service and other groups,
- understand the dynamics of family life,
- be aware of community resources that can support efforts in marketing and in serving parents.

State Regulations Governing Minimum Qualifications

There are no federal regulations governing the qualifications of directors. Standards are mainly determined by state regulatory bodies. In most states, regulation of child care personnel is tied to center licensing and falls under the auspices of the Department of Public Welfare or the state's equivalent to the Department of Child and Family Social Services. Among states, regulations for almost every requirement differ with striking diversity (Morgan, 1987). The regulations are neither consistent nor specific.

Requirements for child care personnel are not uniformly regulated, as are requirements for entry into primary education positions (Berk, 1985). Some states do not differentiate personnel roles in child care settings, and place directors in the broad category of *child worker*. Others

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define a second level of teacher more highly qualified in child development than other teachers, but do not necessarily designate this person to fill the role of director. States that set requirements for directors often use quite different terms to define the director's role.

Background Qualifications. The minimum age for directors is set at 18 or 21 in most states. Some states require demonstrated proficiency in basic literacy skills. In 9 states, directors are not required to have any relevant qualifying education. Several states require high school education, but only if the centers employ someone else to be responsible for programmatic aspects (Morgan, 1987). Directors are required to be well-qualified in child development in 26 states, and 10 require substantial coursework. Only 6 states require directors to have had courses in administration. Ongoing training for directors is required by 12 states (Morgan, 1987).

Experience and Formal Education Qualifications. In the past, states often equated a year of experience with a year of college. But research has shown that education in early childhood or child development has a far stronger positive impact than years of experience on teacher behavior and student achievement. States are increasingly linking levels of experience to formal educational requirements.

Current Levels of Training and Experience

Child care directors are overwhelmingly (88-92%) female. They are experienced, averaging over 9 years in the field of early childhood. The baccalaureate is held by 78%, and 38% have a master's or doctorate. The level of formal training appears to have increased in the last 15 years.

Child care directors are typically promoted to their positions from the ranks of teachers. Of the directors Norton and Abramowitz (1981) surveyed, 78% were head teachers or assistant directors before they assumed their positions. Interest and experience, rather than formal training, seem to be the primary criteria for promotion. Directors with concentrated course work in child care management are rare. Most have put together a patchwork of coursework, in-service professional development, and on-the-job training. Only recently have intensive graduate programs in child care administration appeared (Jorde-Bloom, 1987; Manburg, 1984).

Conclusion

Current trends reflect awareness of the importance of the child care director. Several states are making a concerted effort to increase minimum qualifications. A tendency toward professionalization is emerging. Directors are receiving more education, increasing participation in professional organizations, and using training opportunities to increase their expertise in administration.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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